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ABSTRACT

In the fall of 1970, Hofstra University instituted a policy of exempting those students from English 1 and 2 who had demonstrated superior writing ability on achievement tests and in high school English courses. The question investigated was whether eliminating the "better" students from English 1 would have an effect on the grades assigned in the courses--in other words, whether instructors assign grades on the basis of an absolute standard for writing ability or a relative standard based upon the quality of students in the class. An analysis of the grades given in the fall of 1969 in English 1 in the fall of 1970 indicated that there was no statistical difference in the distribution of evaluative grades (A-F). There were similar percentages of A's and B's given in the semesters before and after the exemption, and the percentage of instructors giving no A's was not significantly different for the 2 semesters. It appears that instructors use a relative rather than an absolute standard of grading. (AF)

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CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF HIGHER EDUCATION

HOFSTRA UNIVERSITY

Distribution of English 1 (Day) Grades Before and After the Exemption of Students Based on Superior Writing Ability*

(A Comparison Between Fall 1969 and Fall 1970 Grade Distributions in English 1)

Pauline Lichtenstein

In the fall of 1970, Hofstra University instituted a policy of exempting those students from English 1 and 2 who demonstrated superior writing ability. The criteria for exemption were a score of 590 or over on the CEEB English Composition Achievement Test in combination with either (1) graduation in the top high school decile, or (2) a high school English grade in the Junior or Senior year of 90 or over, or (3) a New York State English Regents grade of 90 or over. These criteria were based on an analysis of the scholastic records of those students who took English 1 and 2 in 1968 and 1969 and received at least one A.

The question investigated was whether eliminating the "better" students from English 1 would have an effect on the grades assigned in the course. Put differently, do instructors assign grades on the basis of an absolute standard for writing ability, or a relative standard based upon the quality of the students in the class?

Table 1 presents a summary of all grades given in English 1 in the fall of 1969, before students were exempt and in English 1 in the fall of 1970, after exemption was permitted. From the table it can be seen that there was a decline of about 230 students and eight sections in the fall of 1970 when about 120 students were exempt from English 1. An analysis of the data indicated that there was no statistical difference in the distribution of evaluative grades (A-F). (The Kolmogorov-Smirnov Two Sample Test for large samples was not significant at the .05 level).

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*The tabulations for this study were performed by Wylann Solomon.

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Table 1

Distribution of English 1 (Day) Grades
Before and After Policy of Exemption Instituted

	Fall 1969 (Before) N	%	Cum %	Fall 1970 (After) N	%	Cum %
A's	102	9.6		59	7.2	
B's	441	41.6	51.2	375	45.6	52.8
C's	473	44.6	95.8	346	42.0	94.8
D's	40	3.8	99.6	35	4.2	99.0
P's	---	----	99.6	4	.5	99.5
F's	4	.4	100.0	4	.5	100.0
Total Evaluative Grades	1,060	100.0		823	100.0	
Abs/Inc.	47	41.6		45	37.2	
W's	44	38.9		48	39.7	
Y's	22	19.5		28	23.1	
Total Non-Evaluative Grades	113	100.0		121	100.0	
Total No. of Students	1,173			944		
No. of Sections	53			45		

Although there was a decline in the percentage of A's given, and an increase in the percentage of B's, neither difference was significant; (z=1.89 and 1.72).

In Table 2 data is presented indicating the total number of A's given in each section of English 1 during the two semesters. Thus, in fall 1969, there were no A's given in 17 of the 53 sections or 32.1% of the sections. (Sections of English 1 have an average of approximately 20 students). From this table it can be seen that more sections had no

Table 2

Number and Percentages of A's by Section
Before and After Policy of Exemption Instituted

Number of A's	Fall 1969 Number of Sections	Fall 1969 % of Sections	Fall 1970 Number of Sections	Fall 1970 % of Sections
0	17	32.1	21	46.7
1	9	17.0	9	20.0
2	13	24.5	6	13.3
3	6	11.3	3	6.7
4 and more	8	15.1	6	13.3
Total	53	100.0	45	100.0

students receiving A's after the policy of exemption was instituted. However, this difference was not statistically significant (t=1.48). Also the overall distribution of A's was not significantly different for 1969 vs. 1970. (The Kolmogorov-Smirnov Two Sample Test for large samples was not significant at the .05 level).

In conclusion, exempting "better" students from English 1 did not have a statistically significant effect on either the distribution of evaluative grades (A-F) or on the number of A's given. There were similar percentages of A's and B's given in the semesters before and after exemption was permitted. Also, the percentage of instructors giving no A's was not significantly different for the two semesters. One could conclude that instructors apparently use a relative rather than an absolute standard of grading.